



# IOM

newsletter

IOM International Organization for Migration

## in the UK

London office, 21 Westminster Palace Gardens, Artillery Row, London SW1P 1RR. Tel: 020 7233 0001 Fax: 020 7233 3001  
Liverpool office, 5th Floor, DBH Reception, The Corn Exchange, Fenwick Street, Liverpool L2 7QL. Tel: 0151 225 0248/0249  
Glasgow office, 38 Queen Street, Glasgow G1 3DX. Tel: 0141 548 8116

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Freephone: 0800 783 2332

website: [www.iomlondon.org](http://www.iomlondon.org)

## IOM UK hosts an "African Consultation Day" with African Diaspora Community Groups



On 11 May 2006, IOM hosted a one-day "African Consultation Day" at the Queen Elizabeth II Conference Centre in London in partnership with three African organizations - AfricaRecruit, Interims for Development, and Skills for Southern Sudan.

The main objective of the meeting was to engage with the African Diaspora in the UK and raise awareness of the opportunities available to African nationals who choose to return voluntarily to their countries of origin with IOM's assistance. Since 2002 IOM has been offering reintegration assistance under the Voluntary Assisted Return & Reintegration Programme (VARRP) which is co-financed by the UK Government and the European Refugee Fund. (See page 4 for additional information). The conference was also an opportunity to announce an interactive reintegration opportunities database to be launched with a press release in the near future.



Seventy representatives from leading pan-African organisations and NGOs in the UK as well as staff from IOM Missions in Angola, Ethiopia, Kenya, Nigeria, South Africa, Sudan, Uganda and Zimbabwe attended the event. Many participated actively in the workshops which were divided into geographical regions in the morning (East Africa, Southern Africa, West Africa) and around three key themes in the afternoon. These themes reflect how IOM's Reintegration Assistance is normally granted to voluntary returnees (business set up, vocational training and education). Each of these workshops was chaired by IOM and one of the African co-host partners. Many delegates also asked questions and raised their own concerns in the conference hall during the day.



The overall impression of the African delegates and organisations was largely positive. 86% of attendees felt that the Consultation Day had met its key objectives while 77% said that it fulfilled their own purpose in attending it. However, there were some criticisms of the event, with 7% estimating that it failed to meet its objectives and 9% their own purpose as attendees. (For more information, see pages 2-3).

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Top: Jan de Wilde, IOM UK Chief of Mission, Ana Fonseca, IOM Project Development Officer & AVR Manager, and Sacha Chan Kam, Reintegration Assistance Manager

Middle: Frances Williams, Interims for Development

Bottom (Left): Peter Moore, Skills for Southern Sudan

Bottom (Right): Onome Ako, AfricaRecruit

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# Views from the Floor

## How the delegates saw the African Consultation Day

### Overwhelmingly Positive...

Over 60% of delegates from African organisations filled in their Evaluation Forms. Their responses with regard to IOM's choice of the venue, information materials, workshops, Online Reintegration Database, lunch, as well as their overall impressions were largely positive.

#### Venue

There was unanimous approval of the choice of venue, the Queen Elizabeth II Conference Centre, for hosting the Consultation Day.

#### Information Materials

84% of the attendees felt that the quantity of information materials available and on display was adequate while 81% thought the quality of these information materials was satisfactory. Only 2% in either case said they were "not adequate or satisfactory".

#### Workshops

While 47% of the participants in the morning workshops said that they were "good", 60% thought the same about the afternoon workshops. Conversely, 37% said the morning workshops were "neither good nor bad" and 21% felt this way about the afternoon workshops. An equal number, or 9%, of attendees in the morning and afternoon workshops said they were "bad" (see opposite).

#### IOM Online Reintegration Opportunities Database

Here too, people responded positively with 84% saying that the explanation given about this Database was "clear", 79% were of the opinion that "it will help promote the existence of Reintegration Assistance" and 88% said that they "will use the Database". But again there were some criticisms (see opposite).

#### Lunch

This was generally appreciated by 86% of the delegates. 5% thought otherwise.

#### Overall impression

86% of the people surveyed felt that the Consultation Day has fulfilled IOM's stated objectives, with 77% saying that it met their own individual purposes in attending it.

#### Other

51% of the individuals polled about the African Consultation Day were men and 37% were women.

Almost all the respondents left either an email address or a telephone number, with the majority leaving both.

### ...but with a few criticisms

In relation to the provision of information, one respondent thought "it might be useful next time to provide some background information on the wider role of IOM and spell out more the scope of the day" while another felt that we "could do with more case studies". However, with regard to the workshops, one participant said that "not enough information was given". He went on to say that the "facilitators seemed not to know how to answer questions".

With reference to the Online Reintegration Database, one attendee said that it is "not clear if IOM is open to adapting and improving it". She also felt that the Database will not help promote Reintegration Assistance "unless information of its existence is disseminated more widely to the communities" and added that "It also does not answer the key concerns, ie security in the UK (Home Office) and in the [home] country."

Lunch was generally rated as "good", but some delegates regretted that there was limited provision for Muslims - no *halal* meat - although IOM provided a vegetarian option.

While one delegate conceded that the Consultation Day had met IOM's objectives, he qualified his comment by saying that "it depends on feedback to the diaspora. [There needs] to be an indication that ideas/suggestions have been taken forward with the Home Office - even if unsuccessful". Equally critical of the event on the whole, one attendee said that [IOM] "needs to develop mechanisms that lessen the 'them and us' atmosphere" and commented further that she "felt at many stages that there were serious communication issues in terms of what people were saying in the workshops and what those on the panel were hearing." As if to reinforce this criticism, another respondent concluded by saying: "I don't think this was a Consultation Day, rather an opportunity for IOM to implement their own agenda. There was an unwillingness to listen to attendees' suggestions and questions often were unanswered."



# IOM's Co-Hosts at the "African Consultation Day"

**AfricaRecruit, Interims for Development and Skills for Southern Sudan** co-hosted the African Consultation Day with IOM. They are all involved in equipping Africans with the relevant skills to enable them to increase their chances of gaining suitable employment in their home countries and more broadly to improve their standard of living.

Skills for Southern Sudan works with a consortium of other organisations (eg *Education Action International* and *Africa Educational Trust*) to 'bring education and education opportunities to the people of Southern Sudan'.

AfricaRecruit and Interims for Development are more pan-African in scope with the latter working mainly with skilled people who wish to go back to Africa and work on an interim basis.



Interims for Development

InterimsforDevelopmentwasdelightedtoparticipateintheAfricaConsultationDayandto co-hostsuchanimportantforumfordisussion. Having successfully partnered with IOM in enterprise development in Zimbabwe, our participation at this event was particularly timely in view of our contribution to the integration component of the VARRP programme.

Through our participation, we have been able to highlight the importance of business skills training in sustaining business success upon repatriation and we hope to extend our partnership in Zimbabwe to other IOM missions in Africa. The response of the delegates made it clear they also see this Consultation Day as the start of partnership between IOM and diaspora groups in the UK and I commend IOM for taking the step of engaging directly with those affected by repatriation and reintegration into Africa.

- Frances Williams



AfricaRecruit's partnership with IOM stems for the need for a uniform and focused approach to the issue of migration and how the positive effects can be enhanced and the challenges reduced for all the stakeholders.

Specifically speaking, AfricaRecruit collaborated with IOM on the Africa Consultation day because it wants to be part of a process whereby individuals who have decided to return to their home countries, for whatever reasons, are reintegrated with as much ease and support possible. They also want to be a part of the consultations that would make the already existing programmes more effective with a voice from the diaspora community, and those directly affected.

- Onome Ako



Skills for Southern Sudan was delighted to be invited by IOM to co-host the African Consultation Day. We felt that the Day successfullybroughttogetheraremarkably large and diverse group of people from African diaspora organizations in the UK. As well as the sharing of ideas about reintegration, in accordance with the main purpose of the event, the Day was a very valuable opportunity for us and other organizations to make new links and build our networks and understanding. In particular for an organizations like ours, focused on one country, it was most helpful to find how many issues were shared across different countries. We are most grateful to all the IOM staff who worked so hard to make the Day such an enjoyable success."

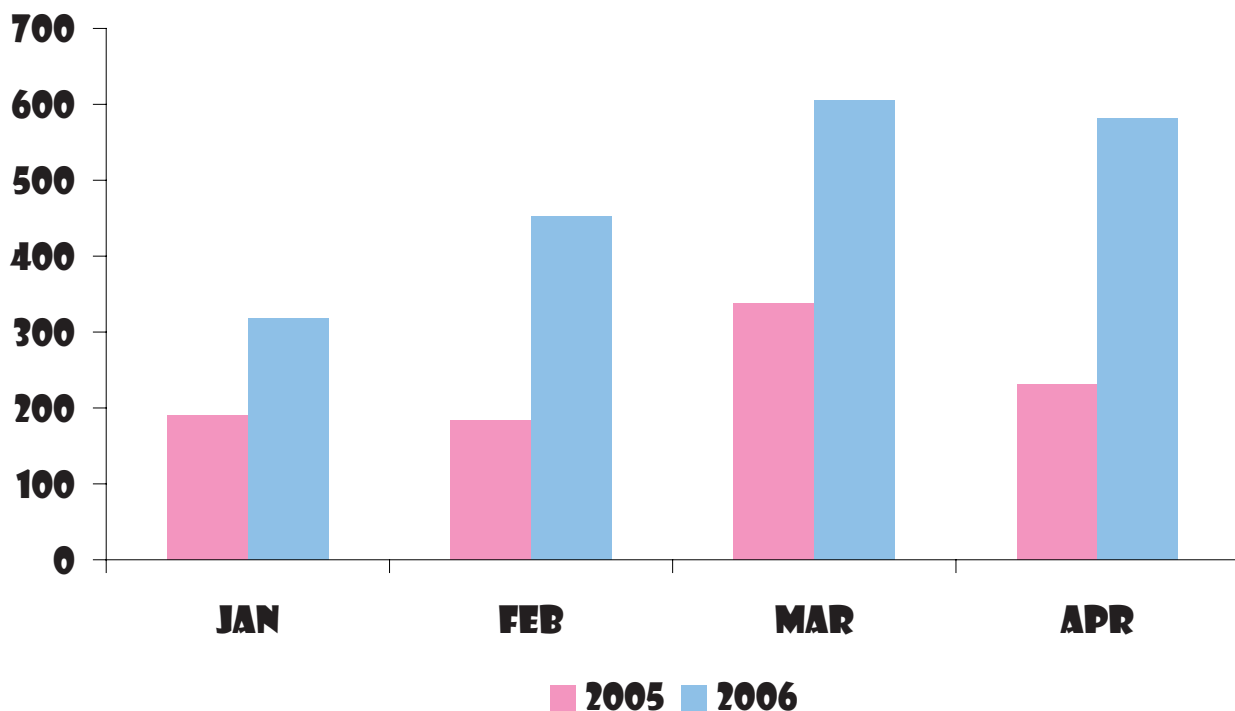
- Peter Moore

# IOM Pilot Enhanced Reintegration Assistance scheme - an update

IOM's "reintegration assistance" is normally worth £1,000. In January this year, this assistance was increased (for a limited period, till June 2006) to a total amount worth £3,000 per returnee. (As a family member, a returnee's child would also qualify for this enhanced assistance). (See IOM newsletter No. 12 for further information about this pilot scheme).

The chart below shows the number of departures under the VARRP in the first four months of 2006 compared to the departures in the first four months of 2005. If the increase in voluntary returns may be attributable to better knowledge and understanding of the VARRP (including its "reintegration assistance" component), it is fair to say that the improved reintegration assistance scheme since the beginning of this year has also been a significant contributory factor. It is worth noting that the small drop in April 2006 (compared to March 2006) is due to the long Easter break. **Overall, the total increase in the period January-April 2006 compared to the corresponding period last year is 108%, ie a doubling up in the number of voluntary returns under VARRP.**

## VOLUNTARY RETURNS - VARRP



Since 2002 IOM has been offering returnees who meet the eligibility criteria "reintegration assistance" under the Voluntary Assisted Return & Reintegration Programme (VARRP) which is co-financed by the UK Government and the European Refugee Fund. This assistance is meant to further assist voluntary returnees in their home countries in one or more of the following ways: start up a small business of their choice; do vocational training or an apprenticeship; continue with their education (the latter includes school education for children as well as higher level/university courses for adults).

Only returnees, who have been within the asylum system, qualify for this component of the VARRP overall package. In other words, at any stage of the asylum process an asylum seeker would be eligible for IOM's "reintegration assistance" under the VARRP (ie whether she/he has made an application for asylum and is waiting for a Home Office decision or has been refused asylum or may even be appealing against a refusal).